

Process...An open dialogue with citizens

*"Our goal is to create
a safe and civil
environment for our
communities, for our
families, for our schools,
for our students,
and for our educators."*
—Superintendent Terry Bergeson
Youth Safety Summit Remarks
August 19, 1998

Gun violence at schools in several states turned the 1997–98 school year into a year of tragedy. Last May, just two days after students were shot at a Springfield, Oregon high school, Governor Locke and State School Superintendent Bergeson asked parents, students, teachers, and concerned citizens, to join them in a summit on youth safety in our schools and communities.

The Governor and Superintendent wanted an open process that gave every individual and every community the opportunity to participate. Throughout the summer, people met in local community forums across the state, studying safety and looking for ways to reduce and prevent violence.

Long before the first forum took place, staff from the offices of the Governor and Superintendent of Public Instruction formed a team to design, develop, plan, and coordinate the statewide study. Youth safety is a community issue, and staff from the Family Policy Council; the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development; and the Department of Social and Health Services Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse offered their help.

Sixty-five communities from 35 counties volunteered to host the local forums. Community organizers were given a suggested format for work sessions, gathering ideas, and analyzing information they collected. Staff and volunteers from local Education Service Districts, Community Mobilization programs, and the Community Public Health and Safety Networks helped organize, set up, and staff the forums.

Most forums began with presentations on school and community violence prevention efforts. The audience was encouraged to comment and share experiences. Everyone discussed six aspects of the community. These topics became the Pillars of Youth Safety described on the next page.

Ideas flowed freely, and the audience shaped them into Youth Safety recommendations.

Sheets of butcher paper were taped to the walls. As ideas were called out, volunteers diagrammed them with magic markers on the butcher paper. Everyone could see concepts grow into recommendations for the Youth Safety Summit. Information from each forum, including the butcher paper banners, was analyzed and compiled into a database of community input. Nearly 3,000 citizens participated in local forums...including more than 830 young people.

The Youth Safety team in Olympia also distributed a survey on public perception of school and community safety. More than 3,750 citizens throughout the state completed this questionnaire and returned it to Olympia.

*"...every stone
in every pillar depends
on the soundness
of the foundation.
The foundation under
those pillars is the
basic character and
nature of our society:
something that is
hardly visible to us, only
because we rarely
focus on it."*

—Governor Gary Locke
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The six pillars were viewed from five perspectives.

What is working
to prevent youth violence?

What is working
to reduce youth violence?

What is not working?

What needs to change?

What can be done
to strengthen the pillars?

*Community forums, the
Citizen Advisory Group, and the State
Summit in Tukwila
searched for answers to these
questions for each of the six pillars.*

The Pillars of Youth Safety were the framework of Summit Recommendations

1. Youth Involvement

Youth can have a dramatic and positive impact on youth culture. Many violence prevention efforts succeed because youth help set the goals, develop the objectives, and provide strong leadership.

2. Violence Prevention

Preventing violence before it begins is the best strategy. Programs based on research teach awareness, enhance social skills, change youth norms, encourage youth mentoring, influence community laws, improve community norms, promote community policing, and foster total well-being of the community.

3. School and Community Support Structures

Resources and support may exist already, such as community social services, counseling programs, intervention specialists at schools, law enforcement, and community or school juvenile justice services. School and public facilities may be available for violence prevention programs.

4. Parents and Families

Youth social skills, attitudes, choices, and behavior begin at home. Community resources for parenting skills training, parent support groups, and involvement at school can improve social skills at home.

5. School Safety and Security

Effective policies, procedures, and security measures can make schools safer and more secure. Security resources may include law enforcement partnerships, security personnel, surveillance cameras, communication equipment, and metal detectors.

6. Media Roles and Responsibilities

The influence of news and entertainment media on attitudes and behaviors about violence must be understood. Television, movies, music, and the internet should offer positive examples of decency and civility.

The Governor and Superintendent selected a Citizen Advisory Group with broad vision and experience.

On June 29, Governor Locke and Superintendent Bergeson appointed 61 citizens to serve on a Youth Safety Summit Citizen Advisory Group. Members were parents, teachers, and students from all over the state. The Governor and Superintendent also selected people with firsthand experience in community and social services; security and law enforcement; school administration; newspaper and television media; local government; and private business. Members are listed on page 28.

In 37 days, the Citizen Advisory Group absorbed a huge amount of information.

These citizens were asked to learn about local issues and priorities by attending at least three community forums in June and July. In 37 days, advisory group members reviewed 65 community forum reports and data compiled from the 3,750 public surveys.

On August 6, the Citizen Advisory Group met all day. They learned about models of violence prevention from experts and shared their experiences from the community forums. Members divided into six youth safety pillar groups. Each group focused on one pillar, studied recommendations from the community forums, and drafted four to six recommendations to present at the summit.

On August 19, more than 400 citizens attended the Youth Safety Summit in Tukwila.

Representatives from 65 community forums, 32 legislators, leaders from state agencies, parents, educators, and over 50 youth were invited to attend the state summit in Tukwila. Opening remarks by Governor Locke and Superintendent Bergeson appear throughout this report. They show the Governor's sincere commitment to solving these problems, and the Superintendent's tireless enthusiasm for getting to work right now.

During the morning session, two nationally recognized experts spoke on youth violence. Dr. David Hawkins presented research on community strategies for preventing youth problem behavior and youth violence. He is Director of the Social Development Research Group at the University of Washington. Dr. Ronald Stephens discussed violence prevention at school. He is Executive Director of the National School Safety Center.

*"As we gather here
this morning
for this statewide
summit meeting
on youth safety,
we have a lot to
celebrate, a lot to grieve,
and most important,
a lot of work to do."*

—Governor Gary Locke
Youth Safety Summit Remarks
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At noon, summit participants divided into the six youth safety pillar groups.

Citizen advisory group members and trained facilitators led the pillar group work sessions. Information presented in the morning session and the advisory group recommendations were starting points for discussion. Again, group ideas were drawn on butcher paper for everyone to see. By mid-afternoon, the pillar groups drafted a new set of recommendations, and presented them to the entire summit for discussion and final approval.

A statewide dialogue built the Youth Safety Summit recommendations.

Every person who filled out a survey, participated in a local forum, or attended the summit in Tukwila, helped shape the youth safety recommendations in this report. More than 7,150 adults and young people thought about how to make school, home, and communities safe places for Washington kids.

Throughout the summer, their ideas and comments were considered—then reconsidered—until the final drafting of the summit recommendations was accepted. This concluded the Youth Safety Summit, and this report sends the summit recommendations to communities, schools, and the Legislature.

Many communities already engage in planning and program development to reduce violence. Other communities struggle to address the issue. These recommendations are a starting point for identifying problems, recognizing resources, and finding ways to increase safety and reduce violence.

It is time to put them to work.

“We need to do everything possible to provide the resources and specific action items for communities and schools before the start of school this fall.”

—Superintendent
Terry Bergeson
Announcing appointments
to the Youth Safety Summit Citizen
Advisory Group, June 1998.